

CURRENT LITERATURE.

A life of Rafinesque.

The Filson Club of Louisville has published in sumptuous form¹ an account of the life and writings of Rafinesque, prepared by Dr. R. Ellsworth Call. This Club is devoted to the history of Kentucky, and its interest in Rafinesque arises from the fact that he was the first "resident professor-naturalist" in the state. Dr. Call is a student of our fresh-water shells, especially the *Unionidæ*, and the devious trail of synonymy led him into the papers of Rafinesque, with the publication of the present memoir as a result. The figure presented to us has always been a picturesque one in the annals of American science, whose work and character have always been a puzzle, possibly because too little is known of either. The *BOTANICAL GAZETTE* (8: 149) once published a sketch of him, in a series of early botanists, but it was merely a compilation of current opinions, and while recognizing his ability did scant justice to his work and spirit. Dr. Call has done well with the material at his command, and seems to have spared no pains in collecting and verifying it. The current notion as to the personality of Rafinesque has been largely drawn, doubtless, from the caricature for which Audubon was responsible. We are very glad to have this corrected by letters, published here for the first time, of persons who had personal relations with Rafinesque as students or friends. He stands forth as eccentric in every testimony, but not as the bedraggled figure in yellow nankeen, with neglected hair and beard, that has been our only description. "Small and slender, with delicate and refined hands and small feet; good features and handsome dark eyes, with long hair, dark and silky; going into society, and a good dancer," is the description of one who knew him while a professor at Transylvania University, Lexington, Ky. Other descriptions accord with this, and add touches which go to show that Rafinesque, although a very absorbed and absent-minded man, was a gentleman in appearance and deportment.

The explanation of his wide and restless roving through almost every department of human activity, culminating as it did in the monomania of his later years, is offered in his early lack of any master to guide him and to direct his impetuous genius into habits of concen-

¹CALL, RICHARD ELLSWORTH.—The life and writings of Rafinesque: Filson Club Publications No. 10. 4to pp. 227, with two portraits and certain reproduced pages. John P. Morton & Co., Louisville, Ky. 1895. \$2.50.

tration, and in his many misfortunes. With no training, no contact with scientific men, and a mind wonderfully self-opinionated, his career is not to be wondered at. He surely was the personification of honesty, and the scientific blunders into which he was led were due either to his implicit confidence in the representations of others, or his exaggerated notions as to the importance of minor variations. When one looks at the bibliography that has been so carefully worked out by Dr. Call, and sees no less than 420 titles, he wonders at the prodigious activity that was possible under so many disadvantages. Opinions as to the value of Rafinesque's work will always differ, but he is none the less a most interesting figure, and, with all his excursions into other fields, was first and foremost a botanist.

Minor Notices.

CONTRIBUTION No. 9, from the U. S. National Herbarium, completes the first volume of this series, and is a report by the assistant botanist, Dr. J. N. Rose, upon a collection of plants made in Sonora and Colima in 1890 and 1891, by Dr. Edward Palmer. The report has been long delayed in publication, and it shows what was expected from such a region as Mexico, and such a collector as Dr. Palmer. As the collections of Pringle, Palmer and others increase in number we begin to appreciate the vast and varied flora which lies just to the south of us, a flora which we will presently have to include in our North American treatises. In the present instance Dr. Rose has wisely sought the aid of recent specialists in various more critical groups. In addition to some very useful illustrations printed in the text, such as leaves, pods, etc., there are twelve Meisel plates, besides the frontispiece. Seventy new species are described, but many other numbers are described without names, a practice which has no advantage and serves to make trouble in reference lists. One must keep track of these described and unnamed forms, but there is nothing by which to distinguish them and they are easily lost sight of. The report is a valuable contribution to our knowledge of the Mexican flora, and contains no less than sixty additions to Hemsley's list, besides the seventy new species.

A CONTRIBUTION to our literature of Arctic plants has just been distributed as a separate from Engler's *Bot. Jahrb.* 19: 4. 1894. It consists of two papers by Dr. F. Kurtz, one dealing with the flora of the Chilcat region in S. E. Alaska, the other with the region of the "Tchuktchies," a people inhabiting the easternmost peninsula of Siberia opposite Alaska. The collections were made by the Krause

brothers in 1882, upon an expedition made under the auspices of the Bremen Geographical Society. The paper contains a description of the regions, and discusses zones of vegetation, trees and shrubs, food-giving plants, introduced species, and local plant names. The lists of plants are full, and evidently fairly representative, accompanied by critical notes. To the American botanist it would be evident at once that Dr. Kurtz has not had access to the more recent monographs published in this country.

A NEAT SOUVENIR¹ of a botanizing trip in the vicinity of Black Barren Mineral Springs, Lancaster co., Pa., has been issued primarily for distribution among friends of the writer. Only the common flowers are mentioned, and their mostly prosaic names rather detract than add to the slight poetical effulgence of the measured lines and rhymes. As a souvenir it is neat and attractive; as poetry it does not strongly impress the unbiased reader.

THE EXCELLENT SERIES of illustrated articles by Dr. W. G. Farlow in *Garden and Forest*, under the heading: "Notes for mushroom-eaters," have been republished in pamphlet form. It makes a convenient popular account of the best and most common edible fungi.

A HANDY ANALYTICAL KEY to the suborders, families and genera of N. A. Pyrenomycetes, recently distributed by Mr. J. B. Ellis, furnishes a much needed assistance in using Ellis and Everhart's work on these plants.

THE PAPER on electricity in plant-growing, by Prof. L. H. Bailey, read before the Massachusetts Horticultural Society, has been distributed as a separate pamphlet.

¹S. M. H. The golden rod and other flowers. 12mo. Geo. W. Richards & Co., Philadelphia, 1894. pp. 20. 25cts.